

# Private Arms Dealer

Samuel Cummings

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At the age of 5, Samuel Cummings learned to dismantle and reassemble a souvenir World War I German machine gun. He believes that was the start of his career. In any case, this boyhood fascination and a robust entrepreneurial spirit have helped make

Man him the world's leading private arms merchant.

News Mr. Cummings is the founder, owner and president of the International Armaments Corporation, which has 17 affiliates and subsidiaries in non-Communist countries.

He is a portly, well-dressed man with a boyish face that continually breaks into a smile as he describes the ironies of the arms trade. His sense of honor is keen but somewhat macabre. His gregariousness is contagious, and he is remarkably candid about his work.

He does not intrigue against Balkan and Southeast Asian governments and he scorns the idea that successful arms salesmen spend most of their time smuggling guns to revolutionaries at night in unmarked aircraft.

Mr. Cummings observes the legalities scrupulously and makes no sales that are not approved in advance by the British or American governments, or both in instances of political sensitivity.

"It would be stupid for us to violate the law," he said. "There's very little money in smuggling. The profits are in the legal sales."

For tax purposes, Mr. Cummings lives in Monaco with his Swiss wife, Irma, and their children. He supervises his company's operations from a 13-room apartment and office there when he is not traveling on business, as he is six to eight months of the year.

The bulk of his business consists of buying and reselling surplus small arms to businessmen, collectors and Communist armies and police forces.

He also arranges sales of larger items, such as tanks and jet fighters, from one country to another for a commission.

His sales volume, he says, runs to eight figures, but is well under \$100 million a year.

"We just take advantage of the world's perpetual arms race," he said, explaining that the new weapons rolling off the production lines are continually creating new surpluses.

Mr. Cummings was born in Philadelphia on Feb. 4, 1927, to a Main Line family that lost its money in the stock market crash of 1929. His father died a few years later, but his mother went to work in a real-estate firm and put her son through the Episcopal Academy there.

His boyhood fascination with arms made him an expert by the time he was a teen-ager. When he entered the army toward the end of World War II he immediately impressed his superiors with



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his knowledge and was made sergeant instructor.

After his graduation from George Washington University, he worked for the Central Intelligence Agency for a short time during the Korean war, but soon became bored. His job was to identify the design of North Korean weapons from photographs.

"I made a great discovery," he said, "they were all Russian types."

He then went to work for the small Western Arms Corporation of Los Angeles, which caters to sportsmen and collectors, as their European and South American arms buyer at a salary of \$5,600 a year and one-eighth of 1 per cent commission.

Within two years he had saved \$25,000 and was ready to go into business for himself. His first transaction was a purchase of 7,000 surplus small arms from Panama, which he resold to his former employer for a small profit.

He then began buying at give-away prices and reselling the tens of thousands of surplus World War II arms in Europe. He had noticed the masses of captured German weapons in the hands of the Russians there during his travels for Western Arms.

Jets for Trujillo

In 1956 he negotiated his first major deal, the sale to the former Dominican dictator, Rafael Trujillo, of \$3.5-million worth of Swedish-owned Vampire jet fighters for a handsome commission.

"I was down selling Mr. Trujillo some .50-caliber anti-aircraft guns," Mr. Cummings said, "when he asked if we had any jets available."

"I said I thought we could arrange it," Mr. Cummings said with a smile, "and we did."

Mr. Cummings neither smokes nor drinks and confines his extravagance to collecting rare old weapons. He is also fond of Iranian cavair.

He points out that despite the substantial volume of his sales, he is a "midget" alongside the Government salesmen who control the vast volume of the post-World War II arms business.

"Nowadays," said Mr. Cummings, reflecting on the great private arms merchants of the past, "we hardly count."